

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 USIE-00 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 EA-06 MC-02 ACDA-05 AID-05 IO-10

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FM AMEMBASSY ROME

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TAGS: PFOR, VN, VS, CB, IT, US

SUBJECT: ITALIAN REACTION TO EVENTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

REF: ROME A-170, A-175

SUMMARY: THE EVENTS IN CAMBODIA AND VIET NAM HAVE TO DATE DONE NO SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE TO THE ITALIAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE UNITED STATES. QUESTIONS HAVE NATURALLY ARISEN AS TO THE RESOLUTION AND ABILITY OF THE UNITED STATES TO SUPPORT ITS COMMITMENTS IN EUROPE, BUT WITH GOOD MANAGEMENT AND SOME LUCK THE SITUATION MAY WELL BE TURNED AROUND TO OUR BENEFIT. END SUMMARY

1. ITALIAN MEDIA REACTION HAS BEEN MIXED, WITH THE LEFT PRESS RE-HASHING AMERICAN PAST "MISTAKES", CRITICIZING THE MANNER OF THE AMERICAN EXIT, AND ATTRIBUTING POLITICAL RATHER THAN HUMANITARIAN MOTIVES TO THE "BABY-LIFT" AND REFUGEE EVACUATION PROGRAM. THE CENTER PRESS WAS GENERALLY SYMPATHETIC TO AMERICAN MOTIVATIONS BUT CRITICAL OF OUR JUDGMENTS OVER THE YEARS.

2. AS PRESS DEBATE EVOLVED, A THEME OF UNCERTAINTY AND DOUBT

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AS TO THE AMERICAN WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY TO SUPPORT ITS

EUROPEAN COMMITMENTS BEGAN TO EMERGE, A WONDERING WHETHER THE US MIGHT BE SLIPPING INTO NEO-ISOLATIONISM. ALL OF THIS HAS LEFT A DEGREE OF UNCERTAINTY IN THE MINDS OF MANY ITALIANS. BUT THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE TO INDICATE THAT THEY HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THE UNITED STATES IS NO LONGER A RELIABLE ALLY AND TRUSTWORTHY FRIEND. EVEN THE NORMALLY UNFRIENDLY IL MESSAGGERO CARRIED A COLUMN (MAY 5) EXPRESSING GRATITUDE FOR AMERICAN AID AFTER THE WAR AND FAITH IN QUICK RECOVERY OF "THE BEST OF THE U.S."

3. MANY CONSERVATIVE, SUCH AS BUSINESSMEN, ELEMENTS IN ITALY ARE WORRIED BUT STILL HOPEFUL ABOUT THE FUTURE COURSE OF US FOREIGN POLICY. THEIR FEARS ARE MAGNIFIED BY THEIR CONCERNS OVER THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION IN ITALY AND BY THEIR FEELING THAT THEIR GREATEST HOPE FOR A STABLE AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT LIES IN SOLID AMERICAN SUPPORT. OUR PROFESSIONAL COUNTERPARTS IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY SHOW INTEREST BUT LITTLE CONCERN ABOUT POSSIBLE WEAKENING OF THE AMERICAN RESOLVE VIS-A-VIS EUROPE. OFTEN PRIVATELY CRITICAL OF THE AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN CAMBODIA AND VIETNAM, THEY APPRECIATE OUR MOTIVES, AND FEEL SOME RELIEF NOW THAT SOUTH EAST ASIA IS "FINALLY OFF YOUR BACKS".

4. THROUGHOUT THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DEBATE THERE HAS BEEN A BROAD AND CONSISTENT THEME WHICH, IN SUMMARY, CONCLUDES THAT SOUTHEAST ASIA IS A CLOSED AFFAIR; AMERICA HAS LOST ITS FIRST WAR BUT HONORABLY SO; THE TIME HAS COME FOR AMERICA TO ADJUST ITS POLICIES AND ASPIRATIONS TO THE NEW REALITIES; THE US SHOULD NOW FOCUS FULLY ON OTHER PRESSING PROBLEMS (EUROPEAN SECURITY, DISARRAY IN NATO, ARAB/ISRAEL, CYPRUS, ETC).

5. RECENT SPEECHES BY THE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN A PERCEPTIBLE SHIFT TOWARD MORE OPTIMISM REGARDING AMERICA. EXAMPLE QUOTES FROM MAY 5 PRESS: "FORD MUST ESTABLISH PRIORITIES AMONG AMERICAN COMMITMENTS IN THE WORLD TO GIVE RENEWED VIGOR AND EFFICIENCY TO AMERICAN LEADERSHIP." FORD'S TRIP STRESSES THAT "THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE IS FIRST ON THE LIST OF PRIORITIES BECAUSE EUROPEAN SECURITY IS VITAL FOR THE SECURITY OF THE US. "AMERICA...IS BACK ON THE WORLD STAGE. AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IS IN FULL SWING AGAIN."

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"THIS IS A GREAT OCCASION FOR ITALY TO START A NEW DIALOGUE WITH WASHINGTON, BASED ON TRADITIONAL FRIENDSHIP, BUT PROJECTED ONTO A FUTURE OF MORE 'ADULT' RELATIONS." "AMERICAN INFLUENCE IN EUROPE AND IN THE MEDITERRANEAN IS UNCHANGED, AND MAY EVEN BENEFIT FROM THE END OF THE VIETNAM WAR." "THE MOST SERIOUS MISCALCULATION WOULD BE TO BELIEVE THAT THE US HAS SUDDENLY BECOME A PAPER TIGER BECAUSE OF INDOCHINA".

6. THE SPLIT BETWEEN THE EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES IN WASHINGTON HAS RECEIVED FULL EXPOSURE, AND CAUSED ITALIANS TO ASK WHETHER THE EXECUTIVE, WITH ALL GOOD INTENTIONS, COULD MAKE GOOD ITS FOREIGN COMMITMENTS DESPITE A RELUCTANT CONGRESS. WITHIN THE LAST FEW DAYS, THINKING HAS BECOME CLEARER AND DOUBTS OF CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE WESTERN ALLIANCE SEEM TO BE SUBSIDING.

7. COMMENT: SUCH DAMAGE AS INFLICTED ON US TO DATE IS LIMITED TO A QUESTIONING AS TO OUR POLICIES AND RESOLVE IN THE FUTURE. THE ITALIANS, ESSENTIALLY, ARE AWAITING TO SEE HOW WE ADDRESS THOSE QUESTIONS. HIGH-LEVEL PUBLIC AMERICAN ASSURANCES HAVE HELPED; THE IMPENDING PRESIDENTIAL VISIT COULD BE OF EVEN GREATER HELP. BUT THE REAL TEST, WHICH INFORMED ITALIANS WILL BE WATCHING, IS HOW WE CONDUCT OURSELVES, VIS-A-VIS EUROPE. IF OUR ACTIONS OVER THE MID-TERM SUPPORT OUR WORDS, WE COULD TURN OUT TO BE IN BETTER SHAPE THAN BEFORE THE SE ASIAN DE-NOUEMENT.

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